No. 268

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
KATHLEEN BLISS

4th September, 1946

DEAR MEMBER,

The editor is discharging her duty to our readers by taking a holiday, and has left me to look after the News-Letter in her absence.

During the first fortnight of August a series of conferences were held in this country in connection with the World Council of Churches, and were attended by many distinguished representatives of Christian Churches in other lands. The significance of these conferences can best be understood in the setting of the growth of co-operation between the Churches since its first beginnings. An account of this was given in a Supplement four years ago (C.N-L. No. 136), but there have been great changes in our constituency since that time and the main facts may be briefly recapitulated.

THE ORIGINS OF CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE CHURCHES

The movement, of which the conferences last month were among the fruits, had its beginnings in the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910. This met on a wider and more representative basis than any previous gathering of a similar kind. It obtained the participation of the Church of England as a whole and not only of its evangelical wing. Among those who took part were Bishop Gore, Bishop Talbot and Father Frere, afterwards Bishop of Truro. It thus became possible for the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, to come to Edinburgh and address the conference in the Assembly Hall of the Church of Scotland. This was something quite new and opened the door for the significant part played by the Anglican Communion in the growth of the ecumenical movement.

What made the conference a landmark in the history of the Christian Church was that under the vigorous and creative leadership of its chairman, Dr. John R. Mott, it took the entirely new step of setting up a Continuation Committee with a budget and secretariat. Up to that time Conferences had met and passed resolutions without providing any machinery to see that they were carried into effect. What was done at Edinburgh was a wholly new move in co-operation between Christian bodies. The Federal Council of Churches in America may have had a whole time secretary, but it

was at that time only a small affair. Strange as it may seem to-day, when I was appointed secretary of the Continuation Committee of the Edinburgh Conference, I was, with the possible exception I have mentioned, the only specimen of my kind in the world, i.e. of an officer devoting his whole time to the service of Christian bodies united for consultation and common action. Those engaged to-day in similar tasks, national and international, must number two or three hundred.

Nearly a decade later action of a similar kind was taken in the political field, when the League of Nations was set up with a budget and secretariat. It is worth recalling, perhaps, that in this type of development the Churches led the way.

The basis of the conference in 1910 was that questions of doctrine and church polity, in regard to which those participating in the conference differed among themselves, did not come within its purview. Bishop Brent, who was one of the most impressive figures at the conference, did not question the propriety of this basis, but insisted that provision must be made in another context for the frank study by the Churches of the differences between them, which were necessarily excluded from the purview of a conference concerned with the practical work of the Churches overseas. Immediately on his return to the United States he took steps to launch the Faith and Order movement which held world conferences at Lausanne in 1927 and Edinburgh in 1937.

Shortly after the end of the 1914-18 war the vivacious, brilliant and tireless Archbishop of Upsala, Nathaniel Söderblom, became convinced that the Churches needed to consider in common the problems of practical Christian work in the home field as well as in their work overseas, and at a conference held at Stockholm in 1925 the Universal Christian Council of Life and Work was brought into being. A second conference met at Oxford in 1937.

THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The two conferences at Edinburgh and Oxford in 1937 agreed to take steps to set up a World Council of Churches in which both movements would be merged. A Provisional Committee was appointed with a secretariat at Geneva, but the process of forming the World Council was interrupted by the war. During the war years the Provisional Committee, with its headquarters in a neutral country, rendered many valuable services in keeping the Churches in different countries in touch with one another and in meeting practical needs. As soon as international communication was restored after the war a meeting of the Provisional Committee was called. This took place last February and an account of it was given by the editor

in C.N-L. No. 256. It was decided to call the first General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, to which ninety-two Churches belonging to thirty-five countries have already announced their adherence, to meet in the summer of 1948. The conferences which took place last month were concerned with the preparations for this meeting.

PREPARATORY STUDIES

In preparation for the Assembly an extensive programme of international study is being undertaken under the guidance of the Study Department of the World Council of Churches at Geneva, the staff of which has been re-enforced for this purpose from both America and Great Britain. The members of the Study Department and a few others specially invited met for two and a half days at Cambridge to survey the task.

The wide range and representative character of the undertaking will be evident from the fact that among those who attended the meeting at Cambridge were the following :

Henry P. VAN DUSEN, President of Union Theological Seminary, New York, and Chairman of the Study Department of the World Council of Churches.

Hamilkar S. ALIVISATOS, Professor of Ecclesiastical Law in the University of Athens.

Bishop G. AULEN of Sweden.

John BAILLIE, Professor of Theology in Edinburgh University.

W. BANNING, Professor of the Church and World Institute in Holland, of which an account was given in C.N-L. No. 266.

F. BEDNAR, Professor at the John Huss Faculty of Theology at Prague.

Marc BOEGNER, President of the Federation of Protestant Churches in France.

G. FLOROVSKY, Professor at the Russian Academy in Paris.

Hendrik KRAEMER, Professor of the History of Religions at Leiden.

Bishop Stephen NEILL, Cambridge.

Reinhold NIEBUHR, Professor in Union Theological Seminary, New York.

Francis C. WEI, President of the Huachung University, Central China

—with more than a dozen others, including the editor of the Christian News-Letter.

It might have been expected that among those representing so many widely divergent traditions a great deal of mutual explanation

would have been necessary and that much time would have been needed to straighten out differences. A surprising community of outlook, however, was manifest from the start. Communication was as easy as it would have been in a group representing a single national or ecclesiastical tradition. It was a matter of general comment how remarkable and rapid had been the growth of mutual understanding. Those who took part in the meeting were made unexpectedly aware how closely they had been drawn together by the common experiences of the war years.

THE ORDER OF GOD

The theme of the forthcoming Assembly is "The Order of God and the Present Disorder of Man." The precise phrasing is still under consideration; it will probably be changed to "Man's Disorder and God's Design."

It is the professed faith of the Churches participating in the World Council that God has intervened in man's historical struggle to save mankind from sin and death and to establish in Christ a new order, which involves a complete and revolutionary break with the values of this world. The Christian era marks a new beginning in human history. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are decisive events which have a cosmic significance.

It is plain to every serious mind how acute is the conflict between this Christian assertion and the modern outlook, for which the Christian story is no more than an episode in a long process of natural and historical evolution, the meaning of which, if indeed it has a meaning at all, is learned from quite other sources. Some of the consequences have been stated by a modern historian, Mr. A. L. Rowse, who in many respects is, or would like to be, on the side of the angels, when he says in his recent small volume on *The Use of History* that the evolutionary theory "has had the effect of undermining the absolute claims of religion and metaphysics, of ethics and law. The idea of God has been rendered superfluous. The evolutionary view of the universe has brought us to an almost completely relativist way of looking at things. Is there any absolute principle to be found anywhere, and if so where? That is where we are now."

Attempts have been made in our time to establish new absolutes in the deification of race or of the proletariat as the bearer of the promise of a classless society. But in none of these can the human mind really rest, and Mr. Rowse describes accurately the plight of modern society. The astonishing thing is that he should view so desperate a situation with so much complacency.

It is welcome news that it is part of the task of the Churches in preparation for the coming Assembly to re-affirm the faith by

which they live and to vindicate it in face of the secular gospels to which men are turning as alternatives. In order to do this effectively it is necessary that by discussion among themselves the Churches should clarify in the light of their different traditions their own understanding of the faith which they have to commend to a world whose pre-suppositions are fundamentally at variance with their own. But a great opportunity will be missed if the preparatory studies remain wholly or mainly within the sphere of intra-ecclesiastical discussion between theologians. An international gathering of the Churches is bound to attract public attention, and thoughtful observers will be quick to see whether the Churches are living in a world remote from the actual conflicts of modern society or are at real grips with the problems that perplex and torment the minds of men and women to-day. What is said by the Assembly will gain the serious attention of thoughtful minds outside the Church only if they instinctively recognize that it proceeds from a real engagement with their perplexities and problems.

The late Principal D. S. Cairns, who died a few weeks ago and who throughout his long life wrestled continuously with the task of relating his Christian thinking to contemporary life and thought, said in his last illness to his son : " I have come to think more and more that Christ did something cosmically once for all and for all men, that does not need to be done again. That Gospel of creation and redemption is worth any man's best energies—to get that made clearer and enforced."

A second formidable obstacle which the faith professed by the Churches has to encounter in the world to-day is the startling discrepancy between the claim of the Church to usher in a revolution and what it actually is. As the Pope asks in Browning's poem, " Is this little all that was to be ? Is the thing we see salvation ? " Unless searching self-criticism is an outstanding note of the meeting of the World Council of Churches, it will accomplish little. Self-examination has been given its place in the programme of preparatory study. How far the Church is in itself involved in the disorder of society is one of the questions to be explored. Much will depend on the radicalism with which the question is faced.

The Cross and Resurrection are central in Christian experience, and a fresh understanding of their meaning will make us realize that the Cross must set its stamp on everything that we do. All Christian thinking is " crucial " thinking. The Churches have too often in the past succumbed to the temptation of giving too easy answers to the problems of society. They have tried too lightly to heal the hurt of the world. If the coming conference is to count for anything this danger must at all costs be avoided. The beginning of any fruitful Christian influence in the solution of the problems which torment society is the frank acknowledgment that the Church no more than

others knows the answers. It only enjoys by faith the knowledge that the answers are there, and that the ultimate meaning of human life and of all its interests and activities is given in Christ. But faith in the ultimate answer does not in itself provide a ready-made solution of the particular problems which confront society. These need for their solution secular skill and knowledge, and the answer can be found in many instances only by sweat and tears and blood. Christians are not by their faith exempted from paying that price.

THE PREPARATORY COMMISSIONS

The preparatory work for the Assembly has been entrusted to four commissions.

The first commission, of which Bishop Aulen of Sweden is the chairman, has as its subject " the Universal Church as the Earnest of the Order of God." Its work will cover much of the ground indicated in the preceding paragraphs. The commission will attempt to state afresh the true functions of the Church and to assess its present shortcomings in fulfilling them. It will also present the results of the studies of the Faith and Order movement relating to the measure of doctrinal agreement between the Churches and of the differences which still separate them.

The second commission under the chairmanship of Dr. Kraemer of Holland will study the " Proclamation of the Order of God," or the task of Christian evangelism. It will endeavour to take full account of the seeming secular alternatives to the Christian Gospel. While the proclamation of the good news of God revealed by Christ is the primary task of the Church, it has to be fulfilled in each age in different ways. The preaching that in one generation won multitudes to Christ may in another fall on deaf ears. In this twentieth century it is becoming plain that most of the traditional methods of evangelism are now bankrupt over a large part of what used to be known as Christendom. Men just can not bring themselves to think in Christian terms. The Church has to set itself to discover again the content of the Gospel of God and to face in the present the paramount problem of communication. This means taking account of where men are standing. The commission will attempt to distinguish and to study separately the wide varieties of types and conditions of men to whom the Christian witness has to be borne.

The subject of the third commission, under the chairmanship of Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, is " The Present Disorder of Man." It will give its attention to two main forms of disintegration. First the break-down in personal relationships ; the most alarming fact about the present disorder is that it has invaded not only the political and economic spheres but is showing its disruptive force in the most

intimate relations between persons, and in particular in the fundamental relations between man and woman. Secondly, the effects of technical developments on community life. The commission will try to reach an understanding of the relations between scientific and technical progress, totalitarianism and democracy. It will also study some of the new beginnings, more particularly on the continent of Europe, in the relation of the Church to the social, political and cultural movements of our time.

The fourth commission, described in the section that follows, will study the relation of the Universal Church to world order, and also serve the Churches in the sphere of practical action in relation to international problems.

COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The conference of the Study Department, of which an account has been given, was preceded by a considerably larger international conference, also at Cambridge, jointly by the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council. The American Commission on a Just and Durable Peace (C.N-L. Nos. 179, 188, 233), acted as hosts. It was presided over by Mr. John Foster Dulles, the chairman of that commission. His first-hand acquaintance with foreign affairs began when he was a member of the American delegation to the Peace Conference at Versailles in 1918. He was adviser on foreign affairs to Mr. John Dewey when the latter was candidate for the American presidency, and accompanied Mr. Byrnes, as a representative of the Republican party, to the conference of Foreign Ministers last year in London.

Under the leadership of the Commission of a Just and Durable Peace, Christian opinion in America exerted an appreciable influence on the San Francisco Conference in securing attention for fundamental human rights and liberties and for the other philanthropic objects set forth in the preamble to the Charter of the United Nations. It is now proposed to set up machinery for international co-operation between the Churches for the furtherance of peace, the pursuit of international justice and humanitarian aims and the promotion of international understanding between the peoples of the world. The conference unanimously approved of the proposal to set up under the auspices of the World Council of Churches a Commission on International Affairs for these and related purposes.

There was a division of opinion whether the commission should be a quite small body that could meet frequently or should be established on a basis widely representative of the Churches of the world. A compromise was reached by the formation of a commission of about thirty-five members which, since it includes members from

countries as distant as Australia, South and West Africa, the Philippines, Japan and Latin America, can only rarely meet as a whole, while the actual working will be entrusted to a small committee, the members of which will keep in close touch with one another. This marks a significant advance in international Christian co-operation. Nothing of the kind would have been possible at Edinburgh in 1910. At that time there were in many quarters the gravest doubts and hesitations about entering into international co-operation at all. But in the past thirty years the Churches have come to know each other better and personal friendships have been established between their leaders. Men like John Foster Dulles, Henry Van Dusen and Reinhold Niebuhr on the American side and Baron Frederick van Asbeck of Holland, who will be chairman of the Commission, Marc Boegner, Sir Alfred Zimmern and the Bishop of Chichester on this side of the Atlantic, have become international figures who are felt to belong not so much to one country as to all.

The effectiveness of a body of this kind depends almost entirely on the strength and capacity of the staff at its disposal. It made a great difference to the attitude of some members of the conference to the proposal when it became known that Kenneth Grubb was disposed to consider the possibility of becoming Director of the Commission and devoting half of his time to its work. He has not yet given his final decision, but if he consents to undertake the task, those who know him will feel a good deal of confidence in the future of the commission. As Director of Overseas Publicity at the Ministry of Information during the greater part of the war he was in close touch with foreign affairs, and his untiring services to the Church Missionary Society, of which he is the president, are evidence of his devotion to the cause that lies nearest to his heart.

The headquarters of the commission will be in the United States, where it will be able to maintain constant touch with the United Nations Organization and, in particular, with its Social and Economic Council. This side of its work will be largely in the hands of Dr. Nolde, who will be co-director of the commission.

There can be little doubt that one of the first and major tasks of the commission will be that of devising means for promoting understanding between the western nations and Russia. A large part of the time at the conference at Cambridge was given to a discussion of this subject. The difficulties were very frankly faced. But the feeling at the close of the discussion was one of increased hopefulness, and of renewed determination that everything possible should be done to bring about understanding and friendship.

Yours sincerely,

W. A. Visser 't Hooft

LATIN AMERICA

By KENNETH GRUBB

There is a Latin America of yesterday which is still stamped on many people's imagination. It is a picture—often an actual screen picture of cowboys and Indians, of revolvers and revolutions and bandits, of the great open spaces where men are lion-hearted, and guitars tender-toned. Leather-leg Pancho puts the government up, and Screw-foot Antonio puts it down, and vast concessions are given by both to foreigners who are milch kine in their own eyes and vampires to their critics.

As one who has fallen into the hands of bandits and out again, I suppose I must admit that there used to be some truth in some of this. But to assume that these gauchos—even in technicolour—are characteristic of Latin America is to rank ourselves among the mulish. For many years to come there will be villages which must be reached on horseback, many millions of illiterates, and numerous communities of Indians who cannot speak Spanish. As in other countries, the new and the old live on together, but the new speaks when the old is dumb.

The modern cultural pattern of Latin America is naturally a blend of different influences. Race, religion and education are the principal ones. But one important reservation must be made at the outset: in spite of an underlying unity, it is difficult to treat the twenty republics as a whole because of their discrepancies in sheer bulk. Salvador is a sovereign state, and so is Brazil; one is the size of Wales, and the other larger than the United States. Three countries are wholly or almost wholly white—Argentina, Uruguay and Costa Rica. In five the Indian element is particularly marked—Mexico and Guatemala, and Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. Haiti is black. Brazil is a colossal stock exchange of humanity where the older Portuguese and the newer occupants mingle, with minor but substantial strains of Indian and Negro blood. The number of pure white families is statistically about half, but even in the kingdom of statistics veracity must needs pay dues to courtesy. It is the Latin American aim to transcend distinctions of race and create a Latin American people, and race distinctions are nowhere officially recognized and everywhere theoretically repudiated.

But the incorporation of the Indians into the main body of the people has not been solved. No one who is familiar with the Indian of the Andes or Central America can fail to see that he lives on in his ancient ways, in poverty and suspicion, and on the margin of

the national life. It is principally in Mexico that an effort has been made to grapple with this formidable task, and the Indian question is the keynote of the Mexican " revolution " of the last twenty-five years. It is convenient to isolate it for discussion, but it is intimately bound up with many other questions, the tenure of land, the progress of education and the reward of labour. It is quite a different problem from the Indian problem of the United States. There Indians were few and from the first were destined to become a powerless minority. The hard riding drive over the great central plains passed rough-shod over their natural rights and very existence, and they survived as little more than enclosed communities. The Indian communities of Latin America form solid bodies of millions of men and women. To try and push them right off the stage is not only impossible, but would never be tolerated even by those who regret their existence as a nuisancy complication.

It is unfortunate that in Mexico the attempt to tackle the Indian question has been made at the expense of a violent quarrel with the Church. The dispute had its roots in the Liberal movement of 1857, the ferment of which never altogether died down. The revolutionary leaders of the period 1917–35 held that the Church, having enjoyed a monopoly of influence among the Indians for some 400 years, had missed all its opportunities. It had totally neglected education, and so far from being the prophet of agrarian reform, had itself become the largest landowner in the country. Feeling ran high. Anti-clericalism is common in Latin America, but at one stage the movement took on the classic insignia of an anti-religious crusade, many churches being closed and some destroyed or secularized. Clergy were deported and education officially established on a materialist basis. This phase died down and the Church is free to-day to conduct its own worship, but the situation is closely watched by the Government. Meanwhile, the more positive aims of the revolution were pursued, a labour code was issued and to some extent enforced ; and vast areas of land divided up among the peasants, largely Indians.

In Latin America the Roman Catholic Church has had some difficult passages to negotiate. Of its general influence in the continent, it is not easy for a non-Catholic to speak fairly. The early conquest was, in part, a religious crusade and the spirit of Christianity, however diffuse, tempered the rough energies of the pioneers. Moreover, the Church has mellowed the rough individualism of the Iberian character and provided a certain standard of culture and civilization which, although too often honoured in the breach, redeemed the colonial venture—carried on at such a distance from the metropolis—from the anarchy of totally unrestricted violence. But little was done, after the first burst of enthusiasm, to nurture,

educate and serve the people. Religious uniformity was maintained by the Inquisition up till the nineteenth century. Subsequently, the establishment of Protestant missions, mainly American, was strenuously opposed. Their success has been varied, and is most conspicuous in Brazil, but everywhere the work of school, hospital and other ventures has proved its value. It is possible to discern in this influence one cause for the renewed attempts of the Roman Catholic Church to-day to secure a firmer spiritual hold of the minds, no less than of the customs, of the people, and not least the educated few. But the current outlook of the governing classes and intelligentsia is one of indifference, although there are exceptions. The Church is a conservative influence politically, although in some republics it has energetically assisted movements for improving social conditions. The higher officers of the army, the landed aristocracy and, of course, the clergy themselves are in most cases the channels through which the Church can influence public affairs. But if Communism has made little real headway in Latin America, it is due as much to the individualism of the Latin American character and the strong nationalism of these young republics as to any religious influence.

Most of the classic problems of land tenure have still to be tackled. Even in Argentina, where the great patrimonial estates are in process of decay, three-fifths of all the farms were worked in 1944 by tenants or share croppers. In the Andes little real attempt has been made to free the Indian from his peonage, and to establish the habit of a healthy moral economy. The spectacle of land-hunger side by side with the vast undeveloped family holdings is not uncommon. Mexico has embarked upon a national scheme of expropriation with small compensation, and much land has been divided among villages and villagers on a complicated system which takes some account of the historic Indian traditions. But the great task of land improvement and profitable agricultural technique has hardly yet been taken in hand even there.

All Latin America is alive to the need for popular education. In most republics the picture of a cultured élite alongside of an illiterate peasantry has been traditional. But there are signs of improvement all round. Everywhere the purpose of education and its relation to the common life are under discussion. The obstacles are fairly substantial. They vary from the lack of trained teachers and resources to the relationship between central and local authorities, and the place of religion in the school, problems which have a familiar ring wherever education is seriously faced.

South of Mexico nothing very remarkable or startling has been produced in politics. Brazil has been ruled for the last fifteen years

by Dr. Getulio Vargas (succeeded in 1945 by General Dutra). He set out to create a " non-party " state, and he largely succeeded ; it is an interesting question whether the success will last. Under his direction, the country has turned from the profitless strife of personalist slogans and has engaged in vast schemes of industrialization, and natural development and reconstruction. The programme has been accelerated by the war-time demand for raw materials, and by the contributions of North American experts and capital. The Volta Redonde steel plant produces about half Brazil's requirements. Finished Diesel and aero-engines have been successfully manufactured. Hydro-electric resources are being steadily exploited, and a wide range of produce ranging from cotton goods to penicillin are put on the market. If the manufacturers' production index for the state of San Paulo in 1911 is taken as 100, in 1943 it stood at 5,473. It is absurd to treat a country of this capacity as an unimportant backwater. It is not merely a passing coincidence that, in the precise hour of Europe's exhaustion, these new countries of the New World are finding new resources of energy and power at home. In the past they have welcomed the European immigrant ; now and in the future they will certainly do so again.

Most visitors to Latin America to-day are impressed with the vitality and the prospects of these young nations. They are neither encumbered with a past, nor wasted with the miseries that sap the living strength of Europe. But Latin America will not escape her own destiny. The ideas to which she pays tribute are large ideas: racial equality, international peace, popular government, the welfare of the American family of nations. But because they are large, they cannot be sustained without large spiritual reserves. They place too great a strain on man's unaided capacity. They are the values which a passionate humanism pursues with unflagging devotion. But too often in Latin America they are seized by tearing them from their roots in God, and they wither in the plucking.

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